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FREE IN
ISSUE 5
Hologram
sticker



4 CONTENTS

SUPER SCARY STORY
Flesh and Blood

OUR HAUNTED WORLD
France
Holiday Howler

STRANGE BUT TRUE
The Angels of Mons

PUZZLES
Pirates

CLASSIC SERIAL
The Phantom of the Opera
Chapter 4

THE UNEXPLAINED
Crop Circles

Next week in

THE SPINECHILLER
Collection

SUPER SCARY STORY
Dead Man's Chest

OUR HAUNTED WORLD
South America
A Snaky Story

STRANGE BUT TRUE
Green Children of Woolpit

CLASSIC SERIAL
The Portrait Painter:
Chapter 1

PUZZLES
The Swamp

THE UNEXPLAINED
Ghosts

FLESH & BLOOD



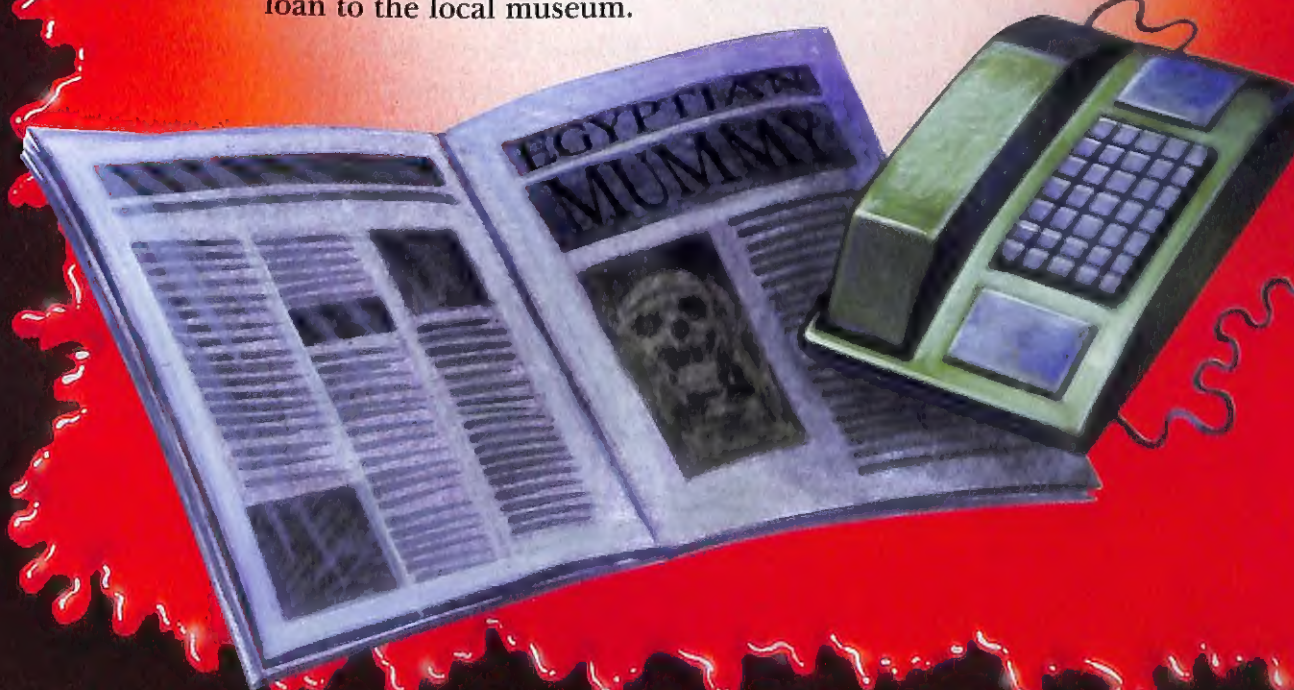
Charlie let out a huff when he saw the rainclouds. "Not today," he whined. "The guys and I were going to play football." He was standing outside with his father who was just getting into his car to go to work. His father slammed the car door, and rolled down the window. "You'll just have to find something to do indoors." He paused for a second. "I've got it. There's a new exhibit from Egypt at the museum. Why don't you go?"

"Thanks, Dad," Charlie replied, sarcastically.

His father shrugged. "Well, I tried," he said.

Charlie watched his father drive off, then went inside and flopped down on a well-worn easy chair. The newspaper was on the coffee table, and Charlie absentmindedly began to flip through it, when an article about the Egyptian exhibit caught his eye. A moment later he was on the phone to his friend Sean.

"It sounds really cool!" he said. "There's a real mummy on loan to the local museum."



And get this – the article says that the mummy was a royal prince who got into big trouble and was cursed!”

Sean sniggered. “Yeah, right.” Then he let out a big sigh. “Well, there’s nothing better to do.”

Within an hour Charlie and Sean were waiting in the museum lobby. Sean had also called Gordon and Kristy to join them.

“Hi!” said Gordon, walking up to them.

“Hello, Gordon,” Sean responded. “Hi Kristy,” he called to a young girl coming through the revolving door.

Kristy grinned. “Let’s go and see this mummy,” she said. “Maybe he’s cute.”



As soon as they entered the museum, the friends made a beeline for the Egyptian room, where the mummy lay.

“Wow, cool!” Gordon exclaimed, leaning over the railing. The sarcophagus was tilted up, making it easier for them to see the dry, shrivelled body inside.

“Gross,” said Kristy, turning away. The mummy was the dark colour of swamp mud. Bits of rotted cloth hung from it, and a few wiry tufts of hair were plastered to the skull.

“Yep,” Charlie said with a smile. “There he is... in the flesh, so to speak.”

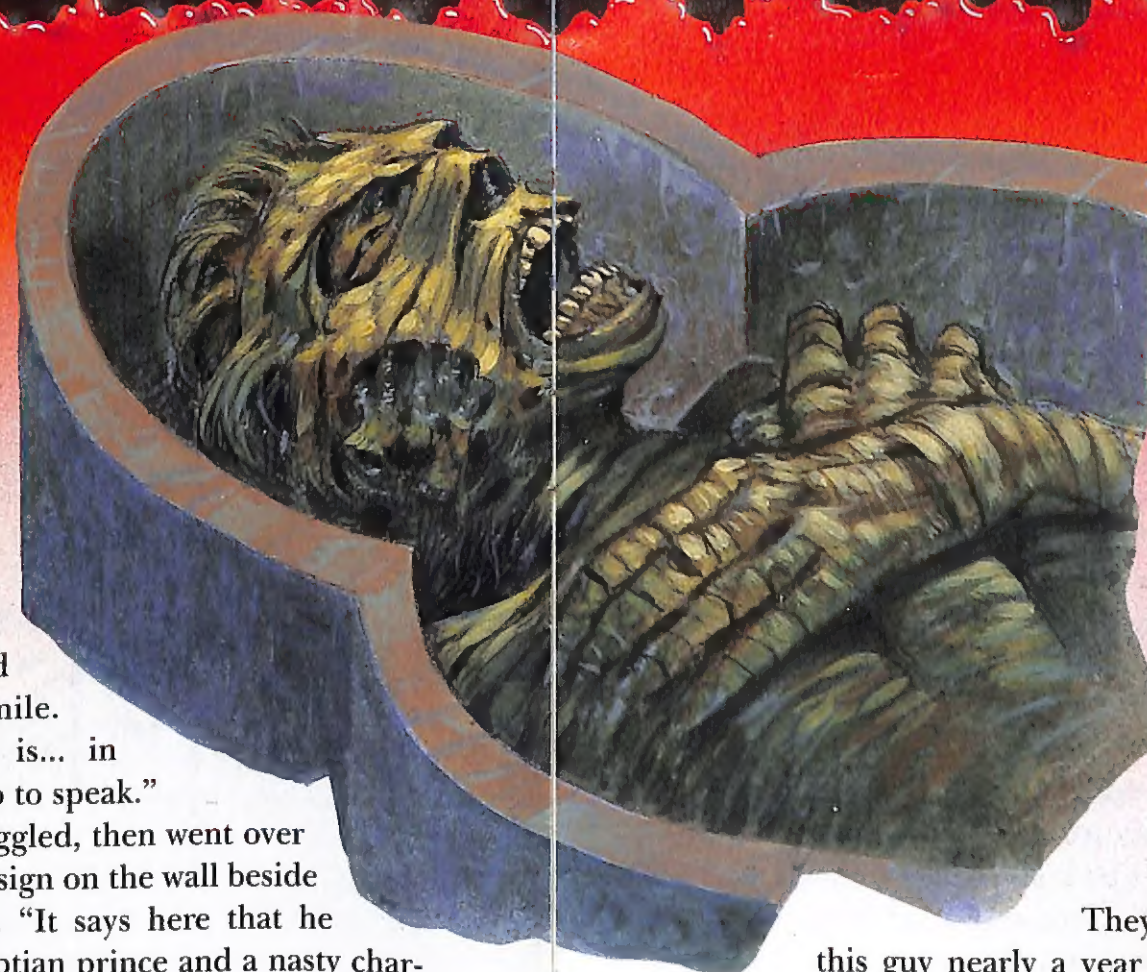
Kristy giggled, then went over to read the sign on the wall beside the display. “It says here that he was an Egyptian prince and a nasty character. A lot of people disappeared during his reign and... Yuck!” she shrieked in disgust. “He was accused of draining blood from others. It says he thought the life force of his victims would keep him young, so he could live forever. When he got caught, they killed him by draining away all his blood.”

“Freaky.” Sean gazed in awe at the dry corpse. “So much for living forever. He’s as dead as a doornail.”

Gordon widened his eyes. “Maybe not. Perhaps,” he kidded in a deep, heavily accented voice, “perhaps he is merely sleeping. And when the moon is full he will awake and take his revenge.”

Charlie stared at the mummy. “Maybe Gordon’s on to something,” he mused aloud.

Kristy shook her head.



“Uh-uh.

They dug up

this guy nearly a year ago and he hasn’t moved a muscle... full moon or not.”

“Maybe conditions weren’t right,” Gordon joked. “Or maybe he really does get out of his coffin and stalk the city at night. He can’t be watched every minute, so there’s no way of knowing for sure.”

“Yes there is!” Charlie said, excitedly. “We could stay over tonight and watch him! Looks like the old guy could do with some company, anyhow.”

Gordon shook his head. “No, my mum expects me home by supper time. Besides, the guards won’t let us stay here all night.”

“You can call your mum and say you’re spending the night at my house,” Charlie reasoned. “And those guards won’t be any problem. We can hide in the toilets until they lock up. The museum doesn’t even have a night watchman, just a guard service that drives by every hour. I know because my uncle works for the service.”

Kristy didn’t seem convinced. “What if we want to get out?” she asked.

Charlie grinned. “There’s a window by the delivery entrance,” he said. “My uncle has found it open a couple of times. I’ll just check to make sure it isn’t latched.”

“The alarm system will go off if we go through the window,” Gordon pointed out.

“So what?” Sean said, grinning. “We’ll be long gone by then. I say we do it.”

“Go on,” Charlie coaxed. “It’ll be fun!”

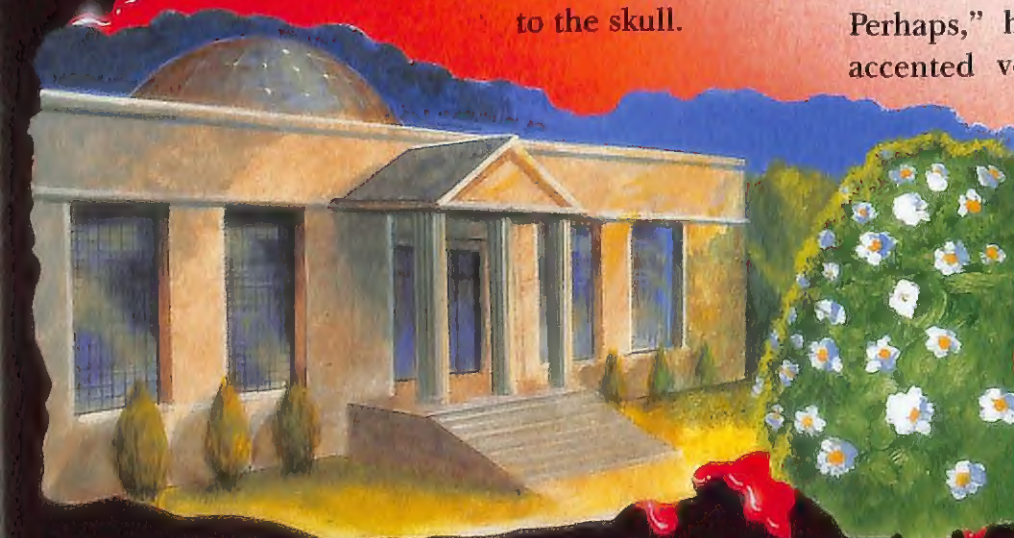
Gordon and Kristy looked at each other and nodded. Then they each went off to phone home.



The guard opened the cloakroom door and stepped inside for a final check before closing for the night. Standing up on the toilet in the last cubicle, Charlie held his breath. Finally the guard let the door swing shut and Charlie let out a big sigh. Sean and Gordon, in cubicles either side of him, did the same. They waited, then Sean tiptoed to the door and peered out.

“He’s gone,” Sean whispered hoarsely. Then all of a sudden he drew back. “Somebody’s coming!”

The boys pressed themselves against the wall as the door swung slowly open again.



"Having fun?" Kristy asked, peeking round at them. "You guys look pale," she said, laughing, then added, "perhaps we should look for the guards' torches. I don't want to sit round here in the dark."

"I've got a penlight on my key chain," Gordon offered. "We can use it to go through the storage cupboards."



After a search through a couple of cupboards, Kristy's idea paid off and the four of them shared two torches.

"It's a bit spooky in here now," Gordon murmured, as they made their way to the Egyptian room.

"Maybe this wasn't such a good idea," Sean muttered. Suddenly he froze. "What's that?" he called out.

He shone his torch in the direction of a rustling sound. The beam fell on a huge, shimmering face with blood-red eyes and sharply pointed teeth.

"Aaaah!" Gordon yelled.

"Chill out!" Charlie shot back. "It's only a mask on the wall." He passed his torch around the edge of the image so everyone could see the long, moss-green feathers that decorated it. One feather was moving slightly, creating the rustling sound.

"There must be some air coming in from a vent," he guessed.

"Well, I've had enough," Gordon said firmly. "You can call me chicken if you want, but I'm leaving."

"I'm with Gordie," Kristy agreed. "You guys can stay, but I'm going home. Where's that window, Charlie?"

Sean looked at Charlie. "They're right," he said. "There's no point in doing this if it isn't any fun. Let's go."

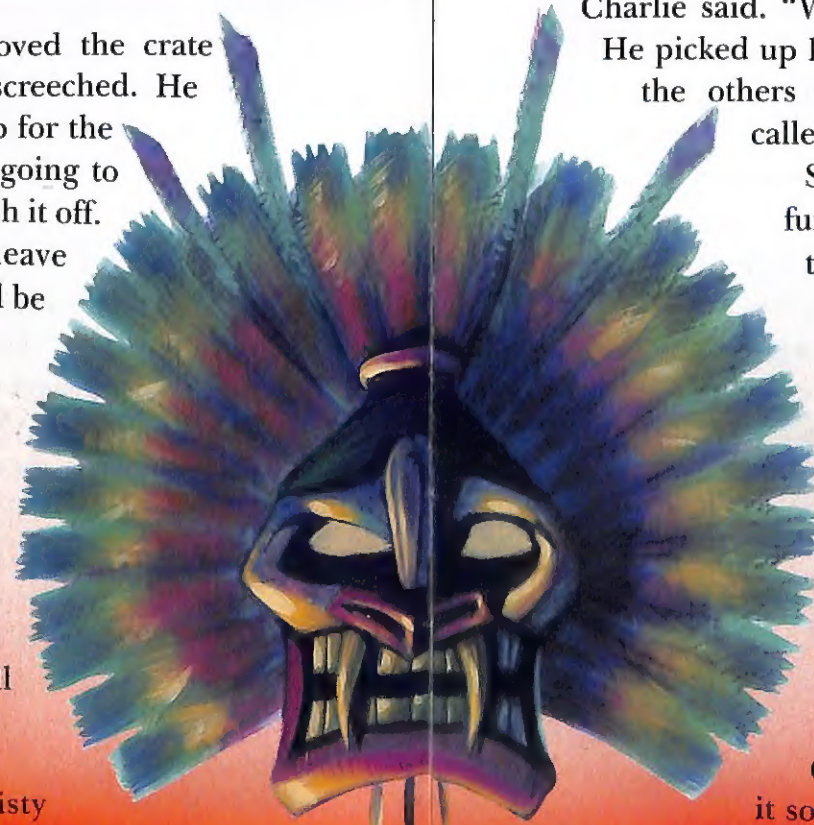
Charlie finally agreed, then led them through the shadowy Egyptian room, down a series of halls, and out the back to the delivery entrance. "There it is," Charlie said, shining his light toward a small window about two metres up the wall. "See – the latch isn't hooked." He pointed to a big crate. "Help me push that underneath so we can reach it."

Quickly they shoved the crate over. "Ow!" Sean screeched. He held up a cut thumb for the others to see. "I'm going to the bathroom to wash it off. Don't you guys leave without me, OK? I'll be right back."

"Ah, fresh blood," Gordon said, joking. "If there are any night creatures around, that bloody thumb should catch their attention. Maybe it'll even wake up old King Tut in there."

"Shut up!" Kristy demanded. She was almost in tears.

"Well, excuse me! I was just having fun. Don't worry, we'll be out of here soon."



"Maybe we won't," Charlie said softly. "There are bars across the window that are bolted from the outside. That must have been my uncle's idea."

"So now what are we going to do?" Kristy moaned.

Charlie jumped off the crate, snagging the sleeve of his dark blue sweater. "We'll have to call somebody to come and get us," he said finally. "We can use the pay phone in the lobby."

"Wait!" Gordon held up his hand. "I heard something. Hey... where's Sean?"

Kristy pointed a trembling finger towards the door that led back into the main part of the museum. "I – I thought he said he was going to the toilet, right?" she stammered.

"Well, he's been gone a long time," Charlie said. "We must look for him." He picked up his torch, motioning for the others to follow. "Sean?" he called out.

Silence. "Sean, this isn't funny," he called again, as they entered the room where the mummy was. A moment later, Charlie's foot kicked something, and he bent down to pick it up.

"That's Sean's torch" Kristy said softly.

Then Gordon gasped and grabbed Charlie's wrist, turning it so the torch beam fell on something just below the sarcophagus. It was Sean, lying on the floor in a crumpled heap.

"Oh, no!" Kristy raced to the boy and turned him over, then covered her mouth to hold back a scream.

Sean was pale. His lips looked pasty white and his skin was slightly shrivelled.



"I don't believe this," Gordon said with a gasp, barely able to speak. "The mummy – look at the mummy!" He leaned in to get a better look.

Charlie felt as if something had sucked the air completely from his chest when he saw that the mummy's flesh appeared fresher and more lifelike. The fingers looked as though they could simply reach out and...

"Look out!" he screamed. But it was too late. The mummy had gripped Gordon round the neck and lifted him off his feet.

"Help me!" Gordon shrieked, trying to prise away the mummy's fingers squeezing his throat. Lunging forwards, Charlie grabbed Gordon's shoulders and tried to pull him away, while Kristy picked up a carved stone figure and beat at the mummy's powerful arms. But nothing seemed to stop the wretched thing, and within seconds Gordon went limp.

Charlie and Kristy backed away as they saw their friend's skin slowly shrivel up. At the same time, the skin of the mummy appeared even more alive.

The life-sucking creature tossed Gordon's body aside and clumsily began to struggle from the sarcophagus. "We've got to get out of here!" Charlie yelled, grabbing Kristy by the hand.

"How?" she screamed. "How? We can't get by it!"

The grotesque being drew in a raspy, laboured breath that sounded like the wind rushing down the corridors of an ancient tomb. It threw back its head and howled, raising its newly rejuvenated arms into the air. Then it stopped as if to listen. Slowly it turned from one side to another.

"Can it see us?" Kristy whispered.

In answer, the thing turned toward them, moving awkwardly in their direction.

"Let's rush it, then split off to either side of it," Charlie whispered. And with no other choice, the two of them raced towards the mummy, then skirted round it. They dashed for the bank of telephones in the lobby, then stood there helplessly. Neither had any change.

Charlie turned his pockets inside out and only came up with dollar bills.

"What are we going to do now?" Kristy cried.

"Listen!" Charlie put his hand over her mouth. The creature's laboured breathing echoed in the main chamber. "We've got to hide."

Looking frantically around, the two finally decided on a small side room with a display of Jacobean furniture. Together they slid under a huge canopied bed just as the sound of heavy footsteps stopped right outside the entrance to the room. Charlie squeezed Kristy's hand. He could feel that she was shaking uncontrollably.

He was in pretty bad shape, too. Droplets of sweat stung his eyes, but he was afraid to brush them away.

Everything was very still – too still. Suddenly, Kristy screeched and began to slide from under the bed, feet first. "It's got my foot!" she cried, clawing at the floor.

Charlie grabbed on to her hands, but he could feel her slipping away from him. Then all at once, Kristy was wrenched out of his grasp.

Covering his ears to block out the sound of her tortured struggle, Charlie knew there was nothing he could do. Then he felt something brush his own foot. "It's looking for me!" his mind shrieked. He kicked at the mummy's fingers and rolled out from the other side of the bed.

In the dim light from a wall display, he could see that the mummy's body was almost completely renewed. All it needed was the life force of one more victim. But Charlie was determined to defy the monster. Dashing toward the main hall, he could see that the windows were barred there, too. He knew the front door was his only chance. He had to go for it, or the mummy would find him sooner or later.

Making up his mind, he picked up a chair and tossed it into a tall glass display that housed early farm tools. The glass shattered, showering the room with sharp splinters that bit through Charlie's trainers. He inched towards the display and grabbed a long metal bar once used as a hoe. Then, racing

to the front door, he began to hack at the lock, and to his relief a high-pitched alarm began to scream into the night.

"Open! Please open!" Charlie cried.

Without turning, he could sense that the thing was behind, perhaps only inches away. He could smell the stench of something that had ceased living many centuries ago... something that shouldn't be walking the earth again, but was. He felt the lock snap and suddenly give way. The door flew open and a rush of cold air burst in.



The first police car flew into the parking lot and screeched to a halt in a flurry of flying gravel. "Look!" one of the officers yelled. "There's someone running toward the back of the building!"

"I'll get him," the second officer responded, as she threw open her door and charged after the retreating figure.

Moments later she returned. "I lost him," she said, glancing at the three other

cars that had arrived. "What's going on, Sergeant?"

"It's a lot more than just a break-in," her partner answered. He pointed to a body just inside the front door.

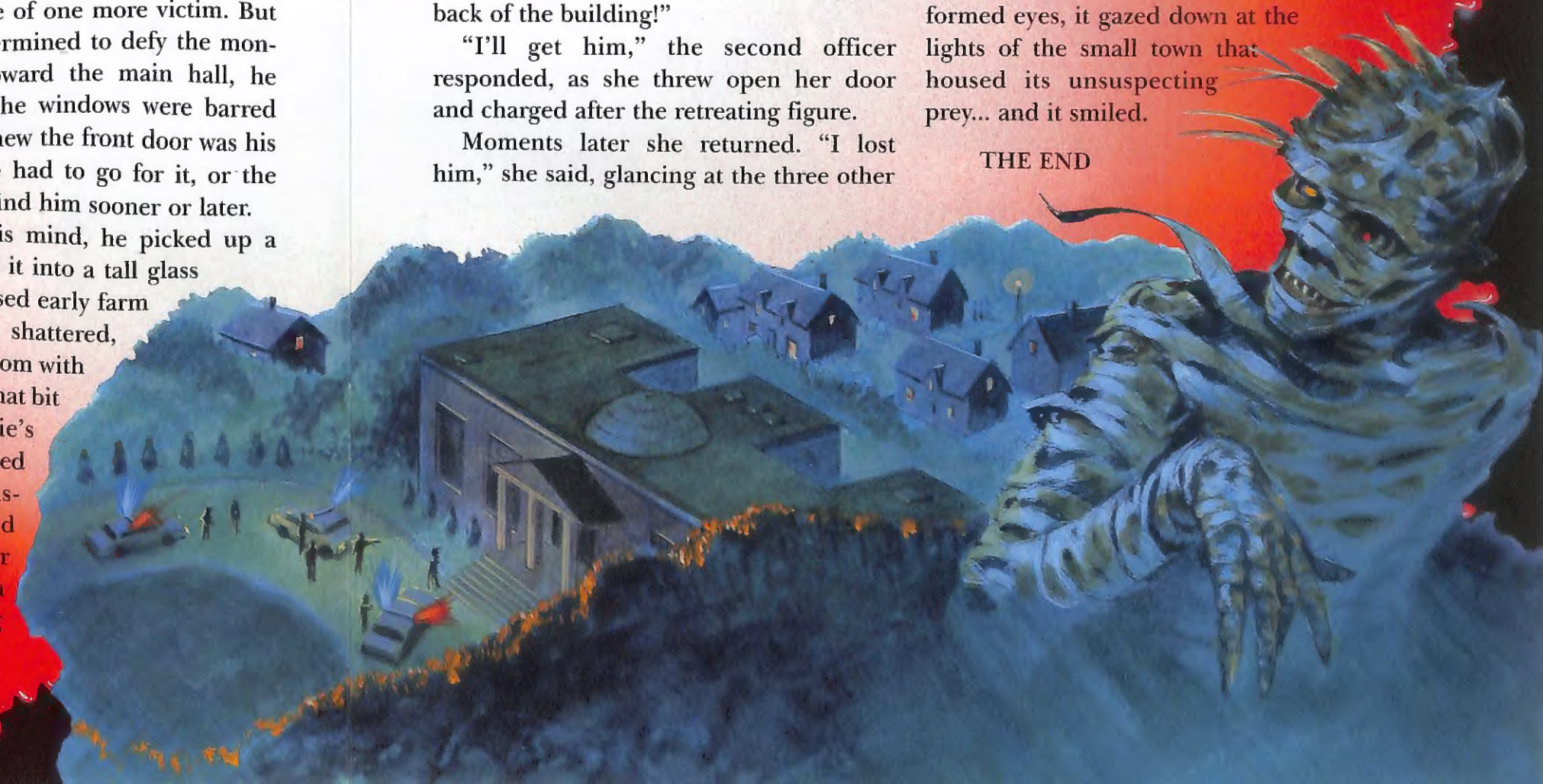
The female officer gasped and turned away. There, wearing a dark blue sweater, were the remains of a body – it was totally dry and withered.

"There are three more inside," another officer said, stepping out through the door. "This is impossible! What could have happened here?"

The female officer glanced up. "There's at least one person out there who knows," she said solemnly. "And we're going to have to try to find him."

From among the shadows on a hilltop overlooking the museum, something drew a deep, cool breath of air into fresh lungs. It felt the warm blood flowing once again through its body. And with its newly formed eyes, it gazed down at the lights of the small town that housed its unsuspecting prey... and it smiled.

THE END



OUR HAUNTED WORLD



WEIRD HAPPENINGS ON THE HIGH WIRE

In 1973, an eccentric Frenchman called Henri Rochatain spent six months living on a high wire 25 metres above the town of Saint Etienne. While he was up there, Henri walked 500 kilometres up and down the wire to keep fit. Most extraordinary of all, however, was how he managed to sleep on a board that was not fixed in any way, but simply balanced on the wire. Rolling over in his sleep would have been enough to send the highwire supremo plunging to his death, but he slept peacefully, even through thunderstorms and high winds.



▲ In 1965, Rochatain broke the world record for tightrope walking when he walked one mile over a dam near Saint Etienne. It took him 2¼ hours.

From France we bring you tales of weird beasts, time travel and trips on the high wire!



UFO bonanza
Rural France went UFO crazy in 1954. In less than two months, 156 sightings of landed UFOs were reported!



TIME TRIPPERS



▲ Anne Moberly



▲ Eleanor Jourdain

In 1901 two English women, Anne Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain, visited the Palace of Versailles. It was over a hundred years after King Louis XVI of France had lived there, but the women became quite convinced that they had slipped back in time.

While looking for a pavilion in the gardens, Anne and Eleanor became lost. They saw and spoke to several people who appeared to be wearing clothes that were in fashion when King Louis XVI was alive.

► As Anne and Eleanor walked through the gardens at Versailles, they were overcome by a strange feeling of sadness. Eleanor felt as though she was sleepwalking. Could they have experienced a timeslip?

They were frightened by a cloaked man with a face horribly scarred by smallpox, but were directed away from him by another gentleman. Later they discovered that their guide had appeared through a door that had been blocked up for years. Finally, Anne saw King Louis's wife, Marie Antoinette, sketching!

History books showed that the gardens the women walked through were just as they had been in the late 1700s. Had the two women travelled through time?



BEASTLY SLAUGHTER

The Gevaudan district in Lozère, south-east France, was the scene of a series of horrific murders between 1764 and 1767. The victims tended to be women and children whose bodies were ripped apart and, sometimes, devoured! The suspect was a huge, wolf-like creature.

As panic spread, master huntsmen were despatched to destroy the creature. In 1765, a massive black wolf was slain, but relief was short-lived as the ghastly killings continued. The horror finally ended when another huge wolf was killed at Mount Chauvet in 1767.

Was it a real wolf – or could it have been a werewolf? After all, the Chauvet wolf had been shot with a silver bullet blessed by a priest – the only sure way to kill a werewolf!

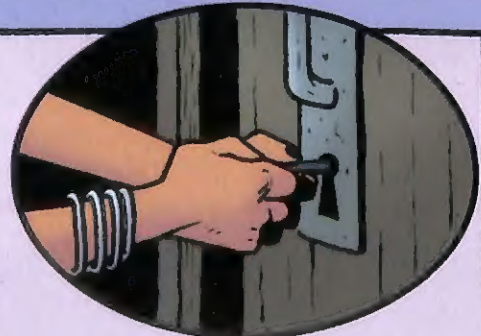
HOLIDAY HOWLER

A student friend told a friend of mine...

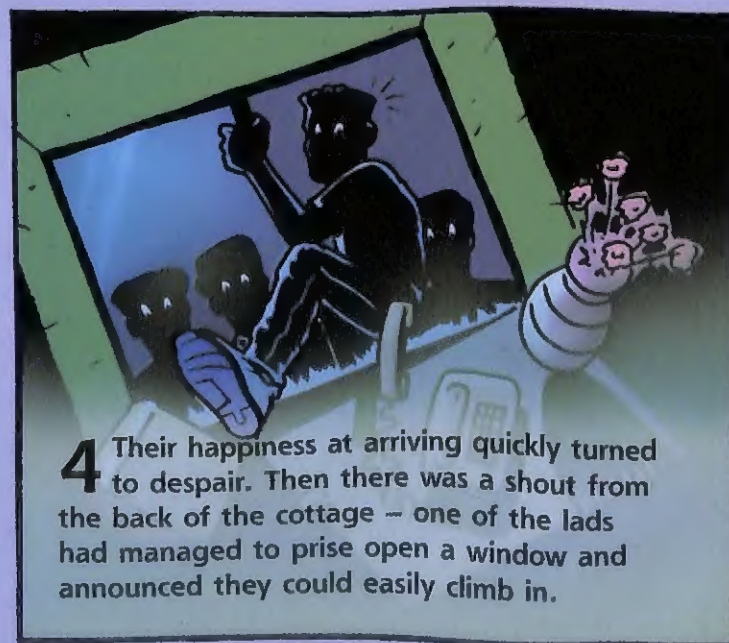
1 ...that her parents had bought an old cottage in the French countryside and she and some college friends had decided to visit it. Claire had a rough map of how to find the cottage and a key. But her parents warned her the lock was very stiff.



2 It was a long drive from Paris, and it was pitch dark by the time they needed to use the sketch map. They turned on to a rough, winding track and bumped along with only the headlamps to guide them.

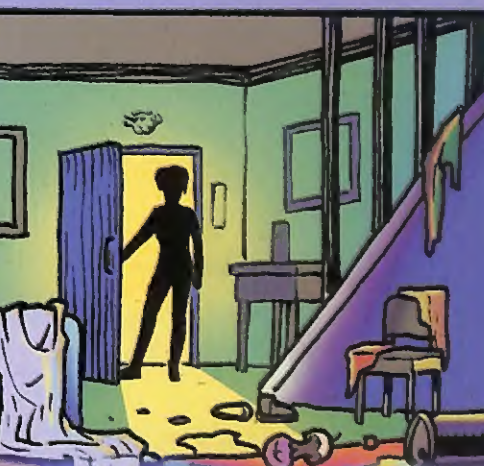
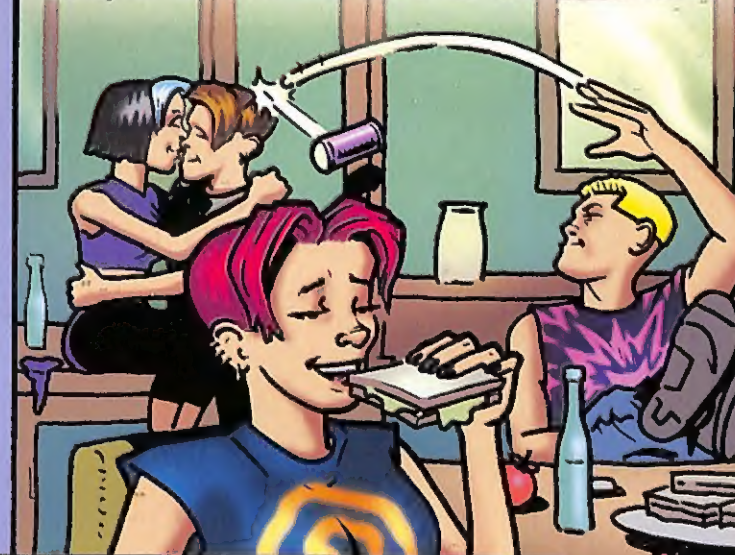


3 Suddenly they spotted a cottage, set back from the road – just as it was shown on the map. With relief they piled out of the car. Claire struggled to turn the key in the front door, but couldn't get it to turn. Her friends all tried, but no one could open the door.



4 Their happiness at arriving quickly turned to despair. Then there was a shout from the back of the cottage – one of the lads had managed to prise open a window and announced they could easily climb in.

5 Inside, they discovered that the cottage was far more luxurious than any of them had been expecting. From the kitchen they found the makings of a midnight feast. Then they all took hot baths and fell into bed.



6 Early next morning, Claire was the first to wake. Downstairs the place was a mess, but she decided to leave it and go and explore.

7 Just down the road, she discovered another cottage. Building rubble was piled outside and when she peered through the dusty windows she saw that the rooms were bare.



8 A horrible thought dawned on her. She felt in her pocket and found the key from the night before. She tried it in the lock and found that it turned quite easily.



9 Inside, she found a note from her parents, warning her about the wealthy, unpleasant neighbours. As she read it, she heard a car coming up next door's drive...





THE ANGELS OF MONS

RESEARCHER'S BACKGROUND NOTES:

In the 1914-1918 war, the Allied troops were retreating from the vast German army, which was marching to Paris. The Times reported that nothing could save these soldiers. Then, after a National Day of Prayer, the troops' lives were miraculously saved! Two officers sent me the clearest accounts of two separate events at Mons.

Record of personal evidence

Report from Army Officer X

About thirty soldiers and myself had been cut off from the other troops by the advancing Germans. Rather than wait to be killed in that gloomy trench, we decided to attack. Expecting to be shot any second, we leapt from cover yelling, "St. George for England!" Racing forwards, we were astounded to see a great troop of men with bows and arrows, running with our small band towards the enemy! The enemy soldiers fell or fled for their lives. Strangely, none of their dead appeared to have any wounds. Later, a German prisoner asked who the mighty leader on the white horse had been, for no one had been able to kill him. We really believed that St. George had heard our prayers and brought his bowmen to our rescue.

Record of personal evidence

Report from Army Officer Y

When we heard the German cavalry behind us, there was no time for our small troop to take cover. We turned, expecting to be massacred. But then we saw that a luminous golden cloud with a distinct shape had appeared between us and the enemy. Many of us saw angels within that glowing cloud, unarmed and facing the enemy ranks. Terrified by the eerie cloud, the enemy's horses reared up, then bolted, out of control. Many Germans surrendered, saying that they'd seen massed ranks of troops - not angels - before their horses had taken fright. We saw and heard many strange things that fateful day, but without the golden cloud, my men and I would surely have been killed.

First World War File: 60

Subject: Did angels or phantom bowmen assist the troops?

Date: August 1914

Location: Mons, Belgium

SpineChiller creates a file

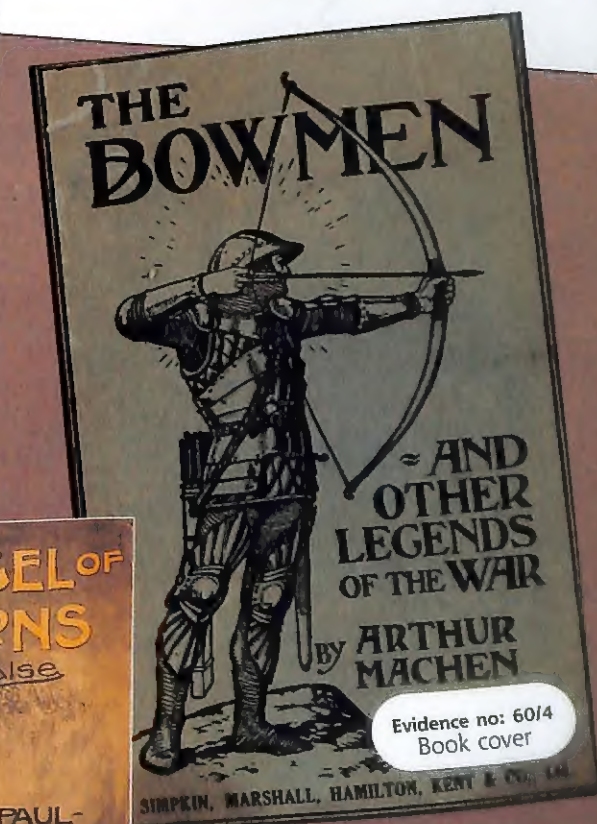


Evidence no: 60/3
Mons, in Belgium,
as it looks today.

Miracle at Mons?

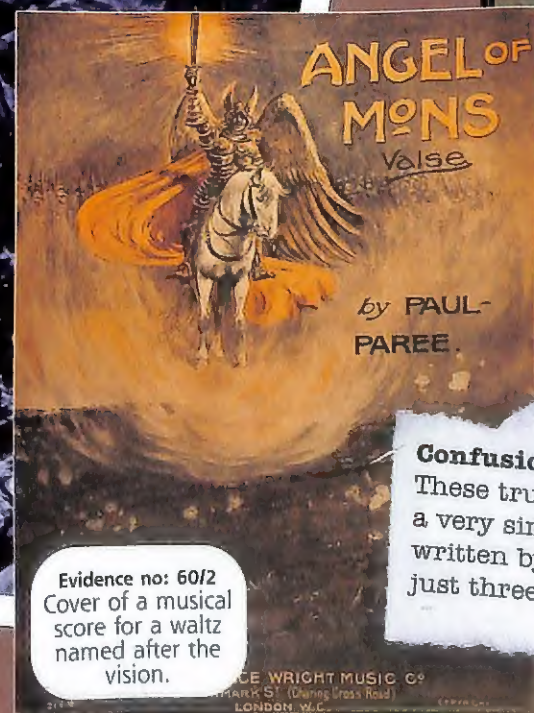
Hungry, scared and battleworn soldiers often have hallucinations of loved ones who give them courage. But the apparitions at Mons were seen by the enemy in one way, and by the Allied troops in another. Whether the visions were of angels, phantom bowmen or even St. George, their appearance certainly saved the lives of many grateful men.

Evidence no: 60/1
'The Bowmen of Mons'
a painting by
A. Forestier, 1915.



Evidence no: 60/4
Book cover

Unexplained



Evidence no: 60/2
Cover of a musical
score for a waltz
named after the
vision.

Confusion on the Home Front

These true stories from Mons were, for a while, confused with a very similar, but fictional patriotic story called 'The Bowmen' written by Arthur Machen. It appeared in the Evening News just three weeks after the strange events at Mons.

PIRATES

MUTINY!

The captain found a crate of dynamite and suspects some of his crew plan to mutiny. Find the link between the number on the crate and three of the pirates lined up to show who is guilty.

66 6 11 12 21 4

FANTASTIC FACTS

The famous pirate, Captain Blackbeard, terrorised ships on the Spanish Main (the Caribbean Sea). He would tie smoking fuses into his hair and carry six pistols when he went into battle. His favourite drink was rum and gunpowder! In 1718, he died fighting against the Governor of Virginia's fleet.

CARELESS CREW

Can you spot the ship's surgeon, carpenter, cook, cat, navigator and look-out on the ship? Between them, they have lost a saw, a hammer, a ladle, a rat, a compass and a telescope. Perhaps you can find these things for them?

FANTASTIC FACTS

Pirates traded with a Spanish gold piece called a doubloon. Each coin was worth eight Spanish escudos which is why doubloons were also called pieces of eight.

PLUNDER BLUNDER

A chest full of plundered treasure has fallen out of the ship and its contents have spilled on to the sea bed. Can you find the contents in the grid? AMETHYSTS, BRACELETS, DIAMONDS, DOUBLOONS, EMERALDS, GOBELTS, GOLD PLATES, INGOTS, JEWELLED DAGGER, MEDALLIONS, OPALS, PEARLS, RINGS, RUBIES, SAPPHIRES, SILVER, TIARAS.

H	M	P	K	S	Z	S	R	H	E	S	U	G	J	B
J	B	G	E	L	E	D	S	S	M	D	B	A	R	R
E	O	N	A	J	L	T	B	R	N	D	D	C	A	G
W	R	P	A	A	O	L	S	O	R	S	Z	C	O	A
E	O	E	R	G	G	T	M	E	N	P	E	L	N	R
L	T	E	N	G	E	A	T	O	R	L	D	Z	K	D
L	M	I	E	L	I	I	E	E	P	O	U	S	O	P
E	H	D	B	D	A	L	V	T	L	R	E	T	M	U
D	C	O	C	R	L	L	S	A	I	S	S	M	B	B
D	G	O	A	A	I	F	T	C	L	Y	R	H	P	L
A	M	S	D	S	S	E	U	R	H	U	S	E	P	O
G	P	E	E	Q	S	M	A	T	B	Y	G	C	W	O
G	M	G	P	Z	D	E	E	I	F	M	N	T	E	N
E	O	B	Z	J	P	M	E	E	I	M	I	H	Q	S
R	H	G	S	E	A	S	K	E	O	T	R	L	T	Y

BURIED TREASURE

This is the pirates' map, but all they have are a few clues to where the buried treasure is. Using the clues below and crossing off places on the grid, can you find the grid reference to the treasure?



CLUES

- 1 Not in the sea
- 2 Not in the marsh
- 3 Not under a palm tree nor one square from it in all directions
- 4 No snakes, scorpions or spiders
- 5 Not under a hut
- 6 No rocks

DESERT ISLAND

Which disc, A, B, C or D, completes the sequence? All the rows down and across add up to 10. Find out first what the island and sun are worth, if the ship equals 3.



ANSWERS

BURIED TREASURE
The treasure is at 4C.
DESERT ISLAND
Ship = 3, Palm = 2, Sun = 1, The missing scene is C.
PLUNDER BLUNDER
The pirates with the numbers 2, 6, and 11 are guilty as all those numbers go into 66 which is on the crate of dynamite.

FANTASTIC FACTS

One of the great pirate centres was Port Royal in Jamaica. In 1692, an earthquake caused half the town to slip into the sea – who knows what treasure trove may be down there?

CLASSIC



SERIAL

Chapter 4

The Phantom of the Opera

Retold from the story by Gaston Leroux

Raoul spent the next day preparing for their journey. Later that evening he was in his seat at the opera house to hear Christine sing for the last time. The performance was a triumph. Christine had never sounded so perfect. But no one was prepared for what happened next. As she came to the very last line of her part, the star of the show simply disappeared!

Raoul raced backstage to find that the managers, scene shifters and other singers were completely baffled. An immediate search was ordered and the police were called. Along with everyone else, Raoul was questioned but he wisely refrained from mentioning the Phantom. He knew from experience that tales of ghosts did not go down well with the authorities.

As he left the managers' office, he was stopped by a man in colourful robes. It was the Persian again.

"Christine is in great danger and only I can help you find her," he told Raoul. "I have had dealings with the Phantom in the past and I know many of his tricks. I hope you have not told the police anything about him."

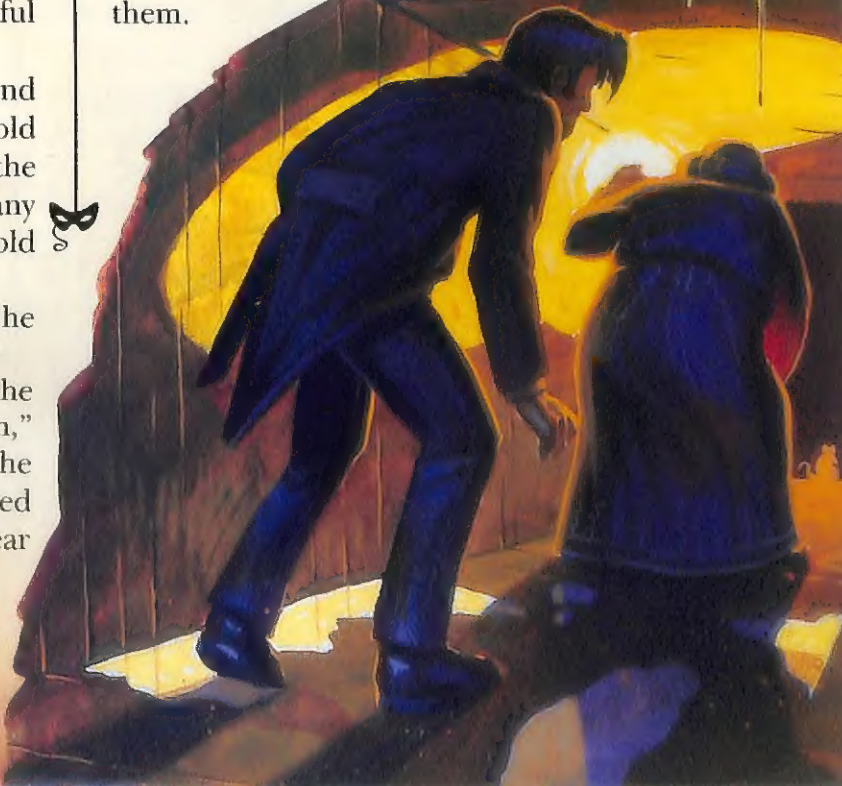
Raoul assured the Persian that he had said nothing about the Phantom.

"We must start by going through the mirror in Christine's dressing room," advised the Persian. "It is the way to the Phantom's house." Raoul remembered how Christine had seemed to disappear

through the mirror. As they made their way to her room, the Persian explained that the mirror was, in reality, a revolving door. "We just need to find the mechanism which turns it," he added. The Persian then grunted in triumph as he found a raised part of the patterned wallpaper. Pressing it, the mirror swung round and the two men walked through to find themselves in a dark passage.

"Follow me," said the Persian. "And please be as quiet as possible."

Raoul crept along behind his strange guide as he was led through a maze of passages under the stage of the great opera house. He saw stage machinery, storage areas for scenery, the heating furnace and the weird devices used for sound effects. They gradually left these familiar areas behind them.



Underlined words are explained in WORD POWER.



The passages grew dark and damp and Raoul remembered Christine speaking of crossing an underground lake.

"That is the way the Phantom will expect us to come," said the Persian. "But my route leads *behind* the lake." The Persian stopped at a paved area. Feeling with his fingertips along a crack between two stones, he pressed a spring and the slab slid sideways to reveal a dimly lit room beneath them.

"I will drop down first and then you must follow me," he said. As Raoul landed beside the Persian, the slab in the ceiling closed, shutting off their means of escape.

The Persian held up his lantern and Raoul gasped. They were in a six-sided room and all six walls were made of mirrors! In one corner was a huge, metal tree whose reflection bounced off the mirrored walls, giving the appearance of a forest. Every way he turned, Raoul saw reflections of himself and the Persian, multiplied into infinity!

"We are in his torture chamber," said the Persian. "One of these walls is a door which leads into his house – somewhere there must be a secret spring which releases the mechanism."

WORD POWER

hallucinate – see things that don't exist

delirious – mind wandering, light-headed, slightly mad

marrow – the soft centre in bones

sodden – soaking wet

mutely – silently, dumbly

As they started to search for it they heard voices. It was the Phantom talking to Christine. "You must choose, my dear. Is it to be the wedding march or the funeral march?"

Raoul pressed his ear against one of the mirrors but the sound came from elsewhere. The Phantom was urging Christine to agree to their marriage. "If you refuse me, I shall destroy everyone. I must leave now, but you have until midnight tomorrow to decide!"

When the Phantom had left, Raoul called to Christine through the wall: "Can you hear me? The Persian and I are here to rescue you. Tap on the wall where the door is and we will find the secret spring."

"I cannot move," wailed Christine. "He has tied me up because I tried to kill myself last night, but I will try to get him to untie me. He keeps the key to the door in a small bag in the next room." A little later, the two men in the torture chamber heard the Phantom return and Christine pleading to be untied. Finally the Phantom agreed.

"I shall only be in the next room," he told her. "I am going to compose the final part of my wedding march." Then, while he was playing the organ, Christine crept into the room and slipped the key in to her pocket. But the Phantom looked round and noticed that the small bag had gone.

"Aha! So you want to see who is in my torture chamber!" he screamed at her. "Shall I take a look? Or shall I let you see?"

Christine begged to look for herself and she climbed a ladder to the spy hole while

the Phantom mocked her. As she looked in, an intense light flooded the mirrored room.

"There is no one there," lied Christine.

While the Persian looked for the hidden spring to release the door, their prison was suddenly getting hotter and hotter and Raoul began to hallucinate. The bright, merciless light shone down as if they were in a desert. Was that an oasis of cool water ahead – or was it just a mirage? Raoul felt as if he was going mad. He screamed for water and pointed at the never-ending reflections. As he did so, the Persian spotted a tiny nail head between two floorboards.

"Just the kind of trick the Phantom would play," he thought, pressing the nail. Part of the floor opened and a blast of cool damp air refreshed them. A set of stone stairs led down into a vast dungeon. Huge, circular shapes stood along the wall. Then, as their eyes grew used to the darkness, Raoul realised that they were barrels.

"It must be the Phantom's wine cellar!"

The two men worked feverishly at one of the cork bungs, but when at last it was free, gunpowder – not wine – trickled out!

"So *this* is how the Phantom plans to kill everyone, by blowing up the opera house and all its inhabitants!" said the Persian.

The two men climbed back into the now darkened torture chamber. Was the twelve o'clock deadline approaching? They had been so delirious in the heat that they had no idea how much time had passed.

"Phantom!" screamed the Persian. "Remember how I once saved *your* life?"

Christine called through the wall, "The Phantom is raving at me to agree to our marriage. In five minutes it will be midnight and I must give him my answer. I

must choose between two handles. One is a scorpion, the other a grasshopper..." She was interrupted by the Phantom's return.

"So you two are still alive in there," he called to the trapped men. "It is time for Christine to choose between the scorpion which stings and the grasshopper which jumps sky high." With these words he let out a dreadful laugh which froze the listeners' bones to the very marrow.

Raoul entreated, "Christine! Don't turn the grasshopper handle!" for he was thinking of the gunpowder which could indeed blow them all sky high! On the stroke of midnight Christine called out,

"I have turned the scorpion."

The two men waited nervously in the chamber – but then a hissing sound made them look round. Water was welling up from the flooded dungeon. The barrels of sodden gunpowder, floating in the water, could no longer be used to blow up the opera house. The water rose higher, swiftly covering the chamber floor.

Before long, Raoul and the Persian had to swim to keep their heads above water. They scrabbled vainly against the slippery mirrored walls, trying to anchor themselves. Then they reached the branches of the iron tree, to which they clung desperately.

"Christine... Christine!" was Raoul's last, pleading cry before he lost consciousness.

When the Persian came round, he was in the Phantom's home. Raoul lay nearby.

"Are you quite recovered?" the Phantom asked. "My wife will give you some water." Christine mutely offered the Persian a drink.

"You are both safe now," continued the Phantom. "Soon, to please my wife, I shall take you up to the surface." The Persian fell once more into an exhausted sleep. When he awoke, he was back in his own bedroom.

"You were found asleep, propped up near the front door," his servant told him.

Once he was strong enough, the Persian went to look for Count Raoul and Christine, but no one had seen either of them. Returning home, the servant quietly informed the Persian that there was an 'unusual' visitor waiting for him in his room.

The Persian entered and there, leaning against the mantelpiece, was the Phantom himself. But he was a changed man. His terrible face was covered by a mask of white wax and his voice was weak and shaky.

"I must tell you that I am dying," he told the Persian. "Dying of love. I have kissed Christine – she looked so beautiful."

"For pity's sake! Tell me if she and Count Raoul are alive or dead!" cried the Persian.

"When I kissed her, she was alive," answered the Phantom. "And she has saved your lives. She pleaded with me to spare you both. Only if I did would she consent to be my wife. Then, when I agreed – and despite my terrible face – she gave me a kiss. Even my own mother could never bring herself to do that. I felt Christine's warm tears flow on to my face but she did not run away from me. Only then did I realise how great her love must be for that young man. Her kiss made me understand that I could do nothing other than release her to him. They have left France and returned to Christine's own country, where they will be married."

The Phantom staggered and nearly fell over. "I was shot recently and I feel that my end is near. I must go now, my friend, but I will let you know when I die."

Three weeks later, the Persian opened his newspaper to read the fateful announcement: 'The Phantom is dead.'

THE END

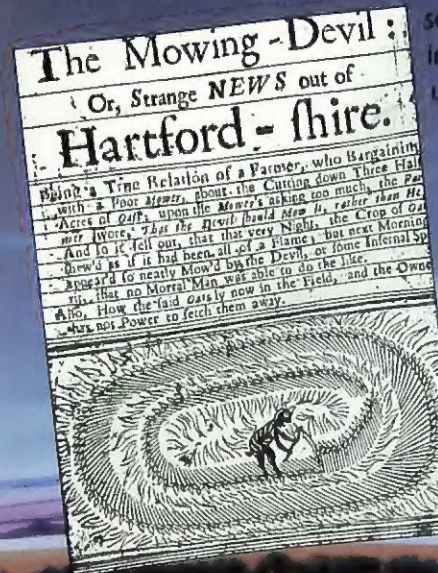
NEXT ISSUE:
The Portrait Painter by Charles Dickens



CROP CIRCLES

Crop circles are patterns which mysteriously appear in growing fields of corn – or in wild, grassy areas. The patterns can be simple circles or complicated geometric designs. Some are just a couple of metres across, others as wide as 300 metres!

The flattened crops are usually undamaged and continue to grow normally, but in a horizontal direction. With most crops, it's impossible to bend the stalks without breaking them. Yet in a crop circle, the bent stalks are neatly swirled in a clockwise or anti-clockwise direction without being broken. Sometimes, the seed-heads are knotted together so much that it's impossible to untangle them.



◀ **EARLY CIRCLES?**
A pamphlet from 1678 blames a mowing-devil for a strange pattern appearing in an oat field in England. Was this an early crop circle?

WHERE TO FIND A CROP CIRCLE

Although these circles have been spotted all over the world, the south of England – especially Sussex and Wiltshire – seems to be the area in which they most often turn up. Many appear near ancient historical sites or near underground water and are usually created at night.

◀ **A CORN GALAXY**
This intricate pattern was photographed in 1994, near the Huish Ridge in Wiltshire.



▲ **ON A GRAND SCALE**
This kebab-style pattern appeared in fields at Alton Barnes, Wiltshire, in the summer of 1990.

HEDGEHOGS NOT THE ANSWER!

Don't be surprised if your compass goes crazy in a crop circle! This often happens, and experts say that whatever force creates the circles also affects the Earth's magnetism within them.

UFOs, static electricity, even rampant hedgehogs have all been suggested as causes of the crop circles. Some people believe that it is the Earth itself which is causing them, and that they are a warning for humans to clean up their act in caring for the planet. The most scientific explanation is that they could be made by small local whirlwinds.

Experts in agriculture, geology, magnetic forces and aviation are, for once, in agreement – none of them can say for sure how these patterns have been created! Even if we don't yet understand what force creates crop circles, or why, most people seeing them believe that their lives have been changed for the better by these strange and beautiful creations.



▲ KEY-LIKE PATTERN

Another pattern in Wiltshire looks almost like a technical drawing.

CEREAL GETS SERIOUS

The public, the police and the Royal Air Force have reported seeing coloured lights and even disc-shaped UFOs above fields where crop circles are later discovered. Some witnesses describe a strange, humming noise in the air. Farmers say that their dogs often bark wildly or that farm animals become noisy during the night, as if disturbed by something unusual. Then, next morning, a brand new crop circle is found in a nearby field!

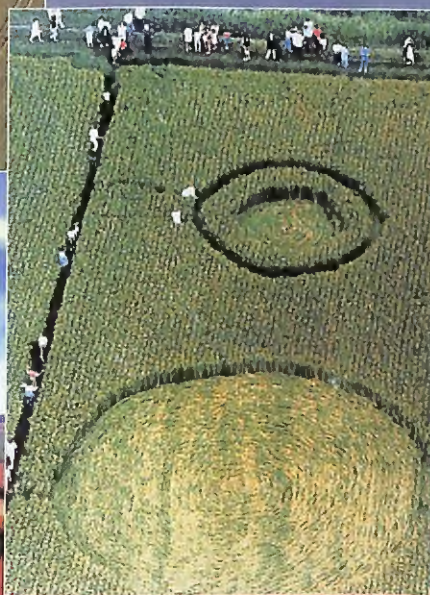
◀ PERFECT GEOMETRY

This breathtakingly complicated design appeared at Windmill Hill, Wiltshire, in 1996.



HOAXERS EXPOSED

Although a few circles have been created as practical jokes, hoaxers' efforts are usually shown to be fakes. No one has ever managed to copy exactly the complicated structure of a genuine crop circle.



◀ JAPANESE COPIES

Schoolboys made these circles in Kasuya-gun, Japan – but you don't need to be an expert to spot the wobbly difference between these and the real thing!